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Items for discussion and decision: World Statistics Day

World Statistics Day

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report was prepared at the request of the Statistical Commission at its fortieth session (see E/2009/24). It contains a proposal to organize World Statistics Day on 20 October 2010 (20-10-2010), in order to celebrate the many achievements of official statistics. World Statistics Day is proposed as a one-off event, building on the many national and regional traditions of having celebratory events of this nature, highlighting particularly the cooperation of statisticians around the world within the global statistical system. The proposed World Statistics Day aims at raising awareness of the many contributions of official statistics premised on the core values of service, integrity and professionalism. The Commission is invited to endorse the observance of 20 October 2010 (20-10-2010) as World Statistics Day. Further points for discussion are contained in paragraph 12 of the report.

I. Background

1. Official statistics are playing an increasing role in our societies and governments. High quality statistical data are now readily available at the national, regional and global levels. They are routinely used in public debate, policy formulation and business decisions. National statistical systems that have been charged with the compilation and the dissemination of official statistics have evolved to become an important national institution in each and every country. In the same vein, the role of Chief Statistician has also been recognized as the unbiased source of statistical knowledge and analysis. The commitments to the production of high quality official statistics are manifested in many ways, be it through population census-taking, household or enterprise surveys, or administrative data systems; through gross domestic product, prices or Millennium Development Goals measurement; or through birth and death statistics. The national statistical system has now proved to be an indispensable national institution.

2. The adoption of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics by the Statistical Commission in 1994 has been a milestone in the codification and the promotion of the basic values in official statistics. These principles contain and promote, among others, such core values as relevance, impartiality, professional standards and ethics, accountability and transparency. At the national level, these values are often written into statistical laws that guarantee the independence of the statistical system and offer support for professional integrity. Many of the basic values of a functional statistical system are irrevocably linked to quality of official statistics, and thus the quality of the information available to the governments, the economies and the public.

3. At the national level, official statistics have served development in many specific areas of the economy, the demography, social and health matters, and the environment. They have done so by providing basic data for planning and monitoring purposes, without which development in these fields would be severely hindered, and progress or success of policies could not be measured. One of the best known achievements of official statistics is the population and housing census. An overwhelming number of countries and areas have been carrying out such a census every 10 years, answering some of the most basic questions of any society: How many are we? Who are we? How do we live? In the year 2010, many countries around the world will indeed be conducting their population census.

4. The long and outstanding collaboration of national statistical systems has also led to the formation of a global statistical system whose members use a common language to share their experiences and to advance official statistics at the global level. One of the major achievements of official statistics at the global level has been the development of international methods and standards, which has ultimately enabled an international data collection and sharing platform through the application of such methods and standards at the national level and the subsequent production of comparable data at the regional and international levels. The most recent achievements have been the adoption of the 2008 System of National Accounts, the completion of the International Comparison Project, the agreement on the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, the approval of

II. World Statistics Day: main objective and theme

5. To celebrate these and the many more achievements of official statistics, the United Nations Statistics Division proposed and initiated to organize World Statistics Day. The celebration in itself is not new. Indeed, more than 100 countries and areas have in the recent past celebrated a statistics day, week or month to raise the profile of official statistics among data providers and users alike in their country. While there are variations in the way these events are held (about 80 of the countries celebrate a Statistics Day annually, some countries observe either a week-long event, or celebrate a Statistics Day every five years or did so as a one-time occasion), they all share the common goal of raising visibility of official statistics. Countries use the occasion of the national statistics day to launch important statistical products or to gather support from policymakers and the public for larger statistical projects.

6. World Statistics Day, planned as a one-off event, would add a global component to the thus far national and regional celebrations. This could enhance the effect achieved to date by the existing Statistics Days, and encourage more countries to celebrate the achievements of statistics.

7. The Statistics Division, in September 2008, requested countries and regional and international agencies to send their views on the proposal of observing World Statistics Day on 20 October 2010 (20-10-2010). The outcome of the consultation was overwhelming support for the initiative, which was reported to the Statistical Commission at its fortieth session in February 2009 in the statement of the Division Director on programme issues. Around 75 countries and international agencies voiced their support, confirming that the time had come to declare such a special day to celebrate all the achievements of official statistics and to enhance its visibility at the national, the regional and the global levels.

8. On the basis of such strong positive feedbacks, the Statistics Division has finalized its proposal to celebrate World Statistics Day on 20 October 2010 (20-10-2010). As many countries are conducting their population censuses around 2010, the choice of 2010 as the year for this celebration will help reinforce recognition of the services provided by the national statistical systems. The conduct of a population census, the single most extensive, complicated and expensive peacetime operation that a country undertakes, is indeed a difficult task, yet it is performed magnificently by official statisticians.

A. Objective

9. World Statistics Day will aim to raise awareness of the many contributions of official statistics premised on the core values of service, integrity and professionalism. It will address a broad audience, ranging from decision makers and data providers to the generally very heterogeneous data-user community, at the national, the regional and the global levels. The celebration will encourage their support of statistics, bringing together users and producers of statistics. The celebration of World Statistics Day will also acknowledge the service provided by

B. Methods of celebration

10. Under the banner "Celebrating the Many Achievements of Official Statistics", countries may choose the appropriate activities for their circumstances. A national seminar, a press release and an exhibition are possible activities. The International Association for Official Statistics will inaugurate its biennial conference on this Day with an appropriate ceremony. International and regional organizations are encouraged to organize similar activities.

11. Appropriate guidance and coordination will be provided by the Statistics Division in the organization of any events. As part of its regular activities to strengthen national statistical capacity and the global statistical system, especially in assisting national statistical systems to raise their professional profile, the Division will provide assistance where possible to countries in terms of publicity, the organization of seminars or workshops, and participation in special events.

III. Points for discussion

12. The Commission may wish to:

(a) Endorse 20 October 2010 (20-10-2010) as the date of the first World Statistics Day, to be observed by national, subregional, regional and international statistical offices;

(b) Endorse the theme "Celebrating the Many Achievements of Official Statistics" and the core values of service, integrity and professionalism;

(c) Request the United Nations Statistics Division to provide appropriate guidance and coordination to countries in the observance of World Statistics Day and provide publicity to the events being organized.